THE WASHINGTON POST
17 June 1979

Article appeared
on page A-16

Officials Differ on U.S. Odds in SALT II's Game of Chance

Last of three articles

By Robert G. Kaiser
Washington Post Staff Writer

American snooping devices in space, at sea and on land, the computers that process their "take" and the analysts who study the results all combine to give the United States an extraordinary window on the Soviet Union's strategic programs. But is it good enough?

The answer to that question must lie in the eye of the beholder. "Good enough" is a political, not a technical category.

Adm. Stansfield Turner, for example, director of the CIA, has publicly reserved judgment on whether the new SALT II treaty can be "adequately verified." Privately, he has concluded that it can be, according to informed sources.

Policing the Treaty—III

Turner, who sits atop the verification bureaucracy, reportedly reached this conclusion after considering what the Soviets could gain from the kind of cheating on SALT II that they might be able to get away with. The potential benefits were small, Turner decided, while the risks of being caught were high.

In other words, Turner has considered the laws of probability is reaching his final conclusion. Despite all the technology involved, in the end verification is a matter of judgment.

Amrom Katz, former chief of verification for the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and an early pioneer in the field of space photography, is perhaps the most articulate proponent of a theory that the Soviets could cheat massively and get away with it.

In Katz' view, the American intelligence community has been guilty of "smugness, arrogance, complacence and overconfidence" in boasting of its abilities to monitor Soviet strategic programs.

Intelligence analysts should be thinking about what they can't see, not what they can, Katz argues. Their success in the past may be misleading, he says, since it is possible the Soviets have wanted the United States to observe their strategic programs.

The Soviets publish no figures on their rocket and submarine forces, he notes, yet they clearly expect the United States to take their strategic forces seriously. Have they perhaps been counting on American intelligence to establish the "credibility" of their forces?

What if the Soviets have also been building and deploying a secret missile force? Katz asks, one that they have *wanted* the United States to observe?

Might they some day announce to the United States that they had 500 extra missiles that they were about to fire at military targets in this country leaving intact their entire SALT-permitted arsenal?

"I'm not saying this is likely," Katz said recently. "It's bad enough that it's unlikely,"—and not impossible.

Katz has reduced his skepticism to a single aphorism: "We have never found anything that the Soviets have effectively hidden." Katz is convinced that important things probably have been hidden.

In a recent debate on verification issues, William E. Colby, a former CIA director, dismissed Katz' scenarios as unfounded.

"It's a tautology to say that if we discover it they must have meant us to discover it," Colby said. He credited U.S. intelligence with the ability to detect any substantial cheating. "I guarantee you we will know in advance" about any significant new developments in the Soviet strategic program, Colby said.

Another response from the intelligence community is that Soviet rockets are elaborate, sophisticated machines that require an array of supporting facilities and manpower that could not be successfully hidden on a large scale.

For example, the trucks that transport the Soviets' SS11 missile, long the backbone of their force, are 180 feet long and easily identified, according to an intelligence analyst.

A conventional missile silo takes months to build. A missile must be fueled, must have special command, control and communications facilities, must be protected by a certain force—and all of these can be detected by U.S. snooping devices, according to working analysts and former officials.

Sen. John H. Glenn Jr. (D-Ohio) has tried to establish himself as an expert on verification, a role many of his colleagues in the Senate appear willing to yield to the former astronaut.

In a series of public statements, Glenn has announced his belief that SALT II cannot be adequately verified with existing American eavesdropping technology.

In a recent interview, Glenn said he feared that the Soviets might be able, clandestinely, to add "three, four or five thousand deliverable nuclear warheads" to their forces without the United States detecting this change.

This is a real danger, Glenn said, because, without the listening posts the United States maintained in Iran, which picked up radio signals from Soviet rockets during test flights, the Soviets might secretly expand the warhead-carrying capacity of their rockets without detection.

As evidence, Glenn pointed to the recent tests of the Soviets' SS18 missile, in which the Soviets apparently experimented with decoy maneuvers suggesting that the SS18 might be able to dispense 12 independently targetable warheads during flight instead of the 10 permitted by SALT II. Why did they do that? Glenn asked. And if they did that, couldn't they go further and develop the capacity to carry 20 or 25 warheads on the giant SS18?

Administration officials respond that Glenn answered his own question. The United States caught the Soviets when they tried those decoy maneuvers, so any similar gambit would be detected in the future, they claim.

But the United States monitored those tests from Iran, Glenn replied, and without Iran that capability is lost.

Not so, administration officials counter. There were three tests of this kind, they say, and one or two—these sources refuse to be more precise—occurred after the Iranian bases were closed. "We 'saw' that decoy maneuver from somewhere else," one official said.

The principal deterrent to this kind of cheating, officials contend, is the need for full testing of such a complex strategic system. And full tests of an SS18 with 20 warheads would be detected by the radar on the Aleutian Islands, they say.